

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8647

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINT, SF

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER VORSTER OUTLINES MEASURES TO CONTROL PRESS

REF: PRETORIA A-171; PRETORIA 3298

1. PRIME MINISTER VORSTER ANNOUNCED SEPTEMBER 18 THAT SAG IS CONSIDERING LEGISLATION TO PREVENT NEWSPAPERS FROM APPEARING ON STREETS IF THEY CONTAIN ALLEGED RACIAL INCITEMENT. HE NAMED RAND DAILY MAIL (RDM) AS PRIME CANDIDATE FOR PUNISHMENT UNDER LAW. (APPARENTLY VORSTER WAS REFERRING TO AMENDMENT OF RIOTOUS ASSEMBLIES ACT).

2. SPEAKING TO LOUDLY APPROVING AUDIENCE AT NATIONAL PARTY ORANGE FREE STATE CONGRESS IN BLOEMFONTEIN, VORSTER SAID HE MIGHT SUBMIT LEGISLATION TO 1974 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION IF NEWSPAPERS CONTINUED TO PUBLISH MATERIAL CALCULATED TO INCITE RACIAL HATRED. CITING RDM BY NAME AS HAVING DEFIED HIS PLEAS FOR SELF-CENSORSHIP AND HAVING CONTINUED TO PUBLISH INFLAMMATORY MATERIAL, SUCH AS LETTER FROM READER SAYING THAT SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT ROBBED BLACKS, HE WARNED THAT OFFENDING

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NEWSPAPERS MIGHT BE KEPT OFF THE STREETS. ASKED LATER IF THIS

MEANT THAT NEWSPAPER MIGHT BE BANNED ENTIRELY OR ONLY PARTICULAR ISSUE, VORSTER REPLIED, "IT WILL DEPEND ENTIRELY ON THE DEGREE OF MALICE PRESENT WITH THE EDITOR CONCERNED".

3. VORSTER SAID CONTEMPLATED LEGISLATION DID NOT CONSTITUTE PRESS CENSORSHIP, EMPHASIZING THAT HE HAS NO OBJECTION TO LEGITIMATE CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT. IT ONLY INCITEMENT TO RACIAL HATRED, VERY DANGEROUS IN COUNTRY WITH MANY POLITICALLY IMMATURE PEOPLE, THAT MUST BE ROOTED OUT. NEXT THREE TO FIVE YEARS WOULD BE CRUCIAL IN FIELD OF RACE RELATIONS, WITH FAILURE LEADING TO "UPRISINGS", AND SOUTH AFRICA COULD NOT AFFORD LUXURY OF UNDERMINING FROM ANY SOURCE, HE SAID.

4. APPARENTLY SEEKING TO DISARM ENGLISH AND AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPER CRITICISM OF ATTACKS ON FREEDOM OF PRESS, VORSTER SAID HE WOULD BE FAILING IN HIS DUTY TO SOUTH AFRICA'S HIGHER INTERESTS IF HE DID NOT TAKE ACTION AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD INCITE RACIAL HATRED. ALL THAT WAS ASKED OF PRESS WAS THAT IT ACT RESPONSIBLY. SAG WOULD NOT INHIBIT FREEDOM OF ACTION OF THOSE WHO RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO HIS PLEA; OTHERS SHOULD BEWARE.

5. COMMENT: BLOEMFONTEIN SPEECH IS ANOTHER CLEAR INDICATION THAT SAG MAY ACT NEXT YEAR TO IMPOSE SOME DEGREE OF CONTROL OVER PRESS. WHATEVER ELSE HAPPENS, RDM APPEARS HEADED FOR SERIOUS CONFRONTATION WITH SAG. VORSTER'S STATEMENT THAT HE DOES NOT CONTEMPLATE DIRECT PRESS CENSORSHIP MAY BE REASSURING, ESPECIALLY TO SOME OF HIS LESS DEMANDING AFRIKANER CRITICS, BUT IT WILL BE SMALL COMFORT TO MOST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDITORS FACING THREAT TO KEEP THEIR NEWSPAPERS OFF STREETS. THEY KNOW FROM PAST EXPERIENCE THAT AUTHORITIES WILL NOT HESITATE TO USE LEGISLATION FREELY. SMITH

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